

**PLAN SANTA BARBARA POLICY DISCUSSION
COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION**

December 3, 2009

-Revised December 4, 2009 -

Commissioner Bruce Bartlett:

The following is an overview of the key components of Plan Santa Barbara that have largely been supported by most of the community. The principles are key to providing an adaptable living document to guide our community planning for the next twenty years in a rapidly changing world.

As the only LEED Accredited Professional and native Santa Barbaran on the Planning Commission, I am pleased that the community has embraced the **Sustainability Framework** throughout the Plan Santa Barbara process. The five policy drivers that apply to all the general plan elements incorporating monitoring through **Adaptive Management** are well thought out. The goal of Plan Santa Barbara is to chart a course utilizing adaptive management policies AM1 - AM4 to guide the community as it continues to evolve.

The **Land Use and Growth Management** goals, objectives and policies are well founded and have been certainly well debated. The growth management policies LG1 - LG8 are basically sound, and further consideration might want to occur on managing our future residential growth in a manner similar to how Measure E has managed our non-residential growth. The land use policies LG9 - LG19 are strong, with the greatest discussion centered around the concept of the Mobility Oriented Development Area (MODA). The latest renditions of the MODA maps and the Draft Land Use maps shun the pattern of "Suburbanist" sprawl in favor of the historic "Old Urbanist" compact development pattern that is the essence of the Santa Barbara we cherish.

The **Economy and Fiscal Health** goals, objectives and policies EF1 - EF21 have broad community support other than the chicken/egg discussions surrounding the jobs/housing balance. In this day and age, we need to encourage more workforce housing to improve the current imbalance and support the local jobs that are threatened.

The **Environmental Resources** goals, objectives and policies ER1 - ER41 are mostly non controversial except for the proposed 500 foot setback on each side of Highway 101. The implications of this huge setback through the downtown core would have the unintended consequence of forcing more people to commute long distances on the very Highway with the alleged health hazards.

The **Housing** goals, objectives and policies are some of the most needed changes in the general plan update process. Though most of the policies H1 - H17 are well intended, they need to be incentive based rather than restriction based. The Variable Density Ordinance needs serious revamping to encourage smaller workforce housing units, both for sale and rentals. I am currently working with staff on exploring a Floor Area Ratio

(FAR) based methodology for multi-family and mixed-use projects as an alternative metric to traditional Variable Density.

The **Historic Resources and Community Design** goals, objectives and policies CH1 – CH15 are the real protectors of our heritage. Serious mapping of all our historic resources needs to be a priority with adjustments made as necessary to the EPV boundary and other downtown design districts.

The **Circulation** goals, objectives and policies C1 – C23 are key to sustainability and have been recently validated by the Travel Demand Modeling for the Plan Santa Barbara growth assumptions. The multi-modal integrated transportation system working in the MODA can hopefully break the cycle of decreasing population with an increase of car commuters and vehicle miles traveled.

The **Public Services and Safety** goals, objectives and policies PS1 – PS12 are widely supported with water supply and water conservation the most critical issues. With a proposed annual growth rate of only 1%, the true sustainability challenge will be achieving water conservation in the built environment which is the other 99% of the problem.

The key to the success of Plan Santa Barbara is not striving for perfection in an ever changing world, but to trust in our proposed adaptive management abilities to navigate the future.

Thank you for the opportunity for continued Plan Santa Barbara dialogue.

Commissioner Sheila Lodge:

A national radio show host recently commented: "When you see Santa Barbara you realize what a big mistake the rest of Southern California is." Santa Barbara is a truly unique and special place - a successful and healthy community in an extraordinary setting. It is not broken, and it does not need fixing.

Over two years ago at a joint City Council/Planning Commission meeting the results of the city's outreach effort were presented. What people love about Santa Barbara was its small town feel, diverse population, scenic beauty, distinctive architecture, preservation of historic character, and its vibrant and dynamic culture.

The city's economy – tourism, retirement income and some high tech industry - is based on maintaining what makes it distinctive. Those are the same things that we love about Santa Barbara. If we lose our views, our small town feel, and don't preserve our historic character we'll be just another California coastal town; we'll harm our economy and our environment.

People are concerned about the lack of affordable housing, the loss of the middle class, and the need to maintain neighborhood character and diversity. In 1948 a Santa Barbara Citizens Advisory Council said that the biggest problem facing the city was a shortage of affordable housing to rent or to buy. Since then some 26,000 additional dwelling units have been built in the city, and we still have the same problem. As long as this city remains as desirable a place to live as it is now, affordable housing will continue to be an issue.

12% of Santa Barbara's housing stock is permanently affordable to low and very low income people, possibly the highest percentage in the state. The city has been able to build projects like Casa de las Fuentes under the present zoning and densities. We do not need to increase them. For middle income housing the city should encourage and enable the suggestions made by Gil Barry and Tom Bollay. There should be a reduction in unit size. We do not need more luxury condos.

People were also concerned that too much growth might adversely affect the character of the city, about overcrowding in the multi-family neighborhoods, building heights & large projects and public health concerns. Higher densities just make these worse.

Sustainability is a big over-arching issue in the Preferred Policies. The most sustainable thing Santa Barbara can do is to continue on its slow growth path. That will put the least pressure on the city's resources, it will protect the things Santa Barbarans love about their city, and it will protect our economy.

In Plan SB traffic has driven all it seems, when the major concerns are preservation of what we have. We don't seem to really know how many commuters there are or just where they are going. We assume that they want to move here, when many of them have family members who work in the towns in which they live. At best we could only make a tiny dent in their numbers.

The city of Santa Barbara can't control development outside its borders. Our neighbors have the benefit of 35' or less height limits to help maintain their small town character. Why should all the density be in Santa Barbara with all the problems brings?

The Impacts of Growth Report found only one benefit - greater cultural opportunities - with higher densities. The main negatives are higher crime rates, higher police costs and dirtier air. And for Santa Barbara, because of the kind of community it is, the cultural opportunities on a per capita basis are far greater than they are in San Francisco or Los Angeles.

This is a wonderful community. Let's keep it that way!

Commissioner Charmaine Jacobs:

I have had the privilege of serving on the Santa Barbara City Planning Commission since 2004. Almost since the beginning of that time, the update of the City's General Plan has been part of the program.

As a Charter City, Santa Barbara has considerable autonomy regarding land use. However, it is worthwhile to consider the State law definition of a General Plan as the "constitution for all future development within the city...to which any local decision affecting land use and development must conform." I believe consistency and sound long range community planning are certainly worthy guide posts for our City and its land use decisions. In short, I take the Plan Santa Barbara process very seriously, as do each of you.

In March of 2005 the City Council adopted nine goals to guide the Plan Santa Barbara process. Key to all of these is the City Charter which sets down the charge to "live within our resources."

In advancing this effort, I would like to highlight five General Plan issues that are vital to continuing the civic mission to live within our resources. Items one and four are described in a bit of detail. The others are self explanatory.

1. Transportation capacity conservation. The City's road structure is mostly built out. It is unlikely that significant additional road capacity can be constructed without large-scale use of Eminent Domain. Traffic capacity is a limited resource, just like its more famous California cousin, water. Our City has been a success story when it comes to water conservation and environmental discipline. It is time to apply that consciousness to traffic capacity in Santa Barbara. I ask the Council to encourage better ways to use the vast Municipal acreage that is our public street system. The City street system predates the automobile by 100 years. Surely our civic leadership today is as good as it was in, say, the 1920's. Our streets have been shared by wagons, bikes, feet, hooves, trolleys, buses, scooters, wheelchairs, cars and even Landsharks. The story of our streets is not over! Plan for best use of the public realm.
2. Prioritize open space and adopt an up to date City Standard for parks and public open space.
3. Initiate a distinct Historic Element as one of the several documents in the City's General Plan.
4. Give creative consideration of the factors that make up the "jobs- housing imbalance". The day-to-day manifestation of this issue is the influx of 20,000 to 30,000 people, every day. It is impractical to construct 20,000 "affordable" housing units in the City. Here is a thought: the City has a surplus of commercial square footage and a deficit of affordable, especially rental, square footage. Is there a way to offer incentives for adaptive re-use of our existing buildings and

maximize residential usage? We could make a difference in the jobs- housing imbalance without adding any new buildings. Properly managed such an initiative would also benefit our traffic capacity conservation efforts.

5. Amplify the Neighborhood Voice. To date, the majority of time has been a "talking heads" approach: i.e. staff talking to Commissioners and Council. The valuable voice of the neighborhoods needs to be amplified. No one knows the resources of their neighborhood better than the people who live there. The Sustainable Neighborhood Plan concept needs to be energized as soon as possible.

Each of these topics is dense with detail and data. My intent is not to go into that here. But I am glad to talk further on any of these topics. They are at the heart of what I hope to promote and preserve in our town.

In closing, I know we all agree upon the need for fidelity to the City Charter and specifically to Living Within Our Resources. The Plan Santa Barbara process is our vehicle to achieve that goal.

Chair Stella Larson:

Section 1507 of the City Charter tells us that development shall not exceed the City's public services, physical and natural resources including water, air quality, wastewater treatment capacity, and the capacities of traffic and transportation. This mandate in and of itself requires that we plan for sustainability throughout the process of the General Plan Update. The environmental investigative process will help us determine how we can best anticipate using our finite resources to the best advantage. We are anticipating the issuing and studying of the DEIR.

The major question to me is this: How can we preserve the small town scale and feel of Santa Barbara and increase density in a built out city without compromising the quality of life of the residents and visitors or exhausting our resources? One need only to open the map furnished us, the draft land use map, to see what a diminutive city we are.

Here are some points to consider:

1. Preserve what we've got. It's simple. Adaptive reuse of existing resources is the most sustainable approach, and often the most cost effective.
2. Explore the acquisition of opportunity sites, such as Earl Warren Showgrounds, and some of the unused military facilities. These can function as land banks for the City.
3. Strengthen the historic preservation policies of the City with the separate Historic Element as we seek suitable sites for redevelopment for the protection of EPV and our historic neighborhoods. Continue to seek compatibility between zoning and

land use. Many parts of the City are turning 50 years old, and are cherished by their residents.

4. Develop incentives to create the types of housing we need as development opportunities arise as part of the implementation plan. Also, as an implementation strategy, incentivize large employers to provide housing opportunities similar to the Cottage Hospital model. Encourage rental housing. Discourage large condos or condo conversions.
5. We have 12 percent of our housing stock as award-winning affordable. This has set a very high bar, and we should continue the quality as we seek to develop more of the same.

You'll be receiving a lot of information. I guarantee this because we have been working for years on this project. We have been fortunate to have the combined talents of Staff and the Commission as well as very well informed and active individuals, neighborhood groups and civic organizations. For five years I've been involved in this process, and we're in the long middle. People have come and gone, Staff has weathered and is weathering its own economic storm, development financing has changed, and thirty years is a blink in time.

NOTE: Any Commissioner's comments received after this printing will be distributed at the Planning Commission meeting of December 10, 2009.

Comments to the New and Returning City Council and Mayor Schneider

Prepared by John Jostes

In spite of millions of dollars of public funds, tens of thousands of hours of staff time, dozens of community meetings and workshops consuming thousands of hours of personal time, what do we have to show for Plan Santa Barbara to date? What do we know today, that we didn't know two, three or four years ago?

Not as much as we should for what we've invested. It has taken twice as much effort and twice as much time to achieve half as much value as the last General Plan update in the late 1980s.

Citizen activists have not changed their minds. Neighborhood preservationists have not changed their minds. Smart growers and new urbanists have not changed their minds. Planners have not changed their minds, and the broader public has less trust and confidence in the planning process than any time in the past 35 years.

The City will release a \$1,000,000-plus EIR supposedly in February, but will the insight gained be worth the price? What do we need to do differently from this point forward, now that the election has brought us new faces on the City Council? A majority of our newly elected council members campaigned with open skepticism toward Plan SB. The entire Planning Commission has been openly critical of the time it has taken to get this far and we don't know how much the process has cost to date.

So what needs to change?

1. The City Council needs to **show some leadership** and "chunk down" this planning effort into fewer, smaller, and more affordable bite-sized pieces that can be completed and implemented by the end of 2010. Place a hold on staff's efforts to make the General Plan map consistent with the zoning ordinance. The general plan is supposed to determine the zoning, not the other way around.

Work instead on a clear set of land use objectives and early action steps that preserves what's good about the community and change what isn't working. Take the good work of the Commission on the Policy Preferences Report and Outer State Street study and either re-affirm it or reframe it. But don't ask for more study; set a course and timeline for results, insist on accountability and come the end of the year, don't accept excuses.

2. **Focus on neighborhoods** - engage neighborhood associations on their own turf, on their own terms, and let them have a legitimate voice in this process. Ask the Mesa, the Upper East, Coast Village Road, Hidden Valley, Outer State, and others what they want to do differently over the next 20 years, if anything. Ask them to articulate what, where, why and how. With the upcoming EIR, the Development Trends Report, the Policy Preferences Report and other documents, we have plenty of information and ideas to create a different future for engaged neighborhoods, if that's what they want.

Give the neighborhoods a three-month timeline, the constraints, and the opportunity to say what they want, not what they don't want, and let the process run its course. Don't let City Staff facilitate or control the conversations, let the neighborhoods do it themselves or ask for the help they need. The Mesa Architects have already done an outstanding job, a job that has been discounted for the

most part by the current process. Their process and product is already a sustainable neighborhood plan - something the planners say won't happen for at least two more years. Different neighborhoods will have different ideas, levels of engagement and needs and interests. If you let the people lead, the leaders will follow. Great cities are made up of great neighborhoods.

3. **Use the Planning Tools we've already got to engage the business community** - Use zoning overlay districts to revitalize the commercial areas that need and want to re-energize. Take the things we like about the MODA and use what works. We've already invested millions to underground utilities along Milpas Street. Find out what Milpas merchants want and provide the incentives to make that happen over the next 10 or so years.

Connect Outer State Street to itself - shuttles, an improvement district, and connections to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. We recently adopted design guidelines for the commercial strip, and invested hundreds of thousands of public funds in the Outer State Street study. Finish the job with a new and improved SD-2 overlay district.

Don't stop good planning at the Freeway, be creative in the Coastal Zone. Let the Funk Zone be what it wants to be - an eclectic mix of residential, coastal oriented industry and visitor serving commercial. Design districts throughout southern California coastal towns like Solana Beach and elsewhere have helped to revitalize local business without gentrifying it into extinction. Ask the people who live and work between Garden Street and Chapala what makes sense for them and memorialize it into a special district overlay. Show some leadership and propose an amendment to the Local Coastal Plan if that's what makes sense.

4. **Lastly, get back to basics as far as public engagement goes.** Stop putting on open houses, stop the "workshops" and stop trying to tell people what they said or what they should think. The City and its consultant have gone about the public education and involvement process as if the public were stupid - "if we only enlighten them, they will agree that our ideas are the right ideas" seems to be the assumption underlying the process to date. Some people simply don't want growth, period. Others want a home to call their own at a price they can almost afford, near their job so they don't have to commute.

Santa Barbara's Planning doesn't have to be grandiose or award winning to be smart, it has to be just good enough that when we look back from 2020, we don't have regrets. It's just that simple.